1. Sexual Life before Maturity

561 Like Europeans, the Pangwe divide the individual's life into
856 three sections, the period of childhood, that of adulthood, and that of old age. The last period, however, concerns the Negro much less than the first two periods of life, because on the average death occurs at an early age. Sexual maturity represents the boundary line between childhood and adulthood, and the Pangwe emphasizes it very much because sexuality is at the center of his religious conceptions and /252/ finds external expression through the initiation into the cults. This initiation corresponds to our confirmation. The Pangwe acts as though a person before sexual maturity -- for the sake of brevity I shall call this person a child (mə̄ngo III) -- represents a stage antecedent to actual manhood, mot III, just as, say, the caterpillar is the stage prior to the butterfly.

774 If we think back on what was said concerning the soul in the
836 discussion of religion /Ed., not translated/, we remember that
964 the Pangwe distinguish two kinds of people according to the kind
852 of soul they possess: bebi'n (uninitiated, good), and bongüs (initiated, evil). Children (bə̄ngo) are bebi'n, uninitiated, good, because they do not know sexual intercourse and, if they have become acquainted with it prematurely, do not know that they are committing a sin; indeed, they could not know since, after all, they are not initiated into the profound connections between sexual intercourse, life, and death.

187 In reality the situation is such that the Pangwe young people
824 are perfectly well informed, but officially each one must emphasize that he is a child, mə̄ngo, that is, good, unknowing, uninitiated as to sexual intercourse, even when he has long outgrown not only the actually innocent childhood (in the narrower sense), but also the period of sexual maturity. This point can be tested on any Negro between the age of ten and 20 years by asking him whether he already practices sexual intercourse. The answer will always be the same, be he a Fang from the bush or a Jaunde long since glossed over by a bit of civilization: "ma ne mə̄ngo (I am
[672] a child, that is, innocent, I know nothing about sexual intercourse)."

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864 By this answer, he secures for himself the mild judgment with
[672] which we dispose of "silly boys' pranks."

For children, bə̄ngo, therefore, quite a different yardstick is applied; what they do, especially in respect to sexual matters, is not taken seriously.

bə̄ngo bă bə̄lĕ oson = children have no sense of shame, and
834 the other way around, adults do not display much towards chil-
155 dren (see homosexual life, Vol. II, page 131), since, after all,
864 children simply do not know what evil (sŏ) is or what shame (o-so-n) means. If the otherwise, at least externally, very modest Negroes say this themselves, we should not hope to find many of the characteristics of a true, innocent ebi'n among the children. As a matter of fact their first playful imitations of
836 sexual intercourse as they observe older people performing it
838 begin at five or six years of age; between the age of eight and nine "playing parents" is nothing but perfectly conscious sexual intercourse, though it is generally regarded as a game and was cited to me in the category of "children's games" under the name ebōbă'ne-bə̄ngo (Ntum) or ebă'nebă'ne bə̄ngo (Fang). It is usually done in the forenoon /253/ in the dwellings when the parents are in the fields or absent elsewhere. The partners are not only boys and girls, but also boys among each other. Later, at the age of eight to 10 years and frequently somewhat beyond, many boys manifest a similar inclination towards members of their own sex, along with a sexual urge for girls of the same age. In view of the emphasis on maintaining, as long as possible, the outward appearance of modesty, the Pangwe boys make use of a device whereby they come to an understanding "metaphorically." A boy
[201] rakes some earth and sweepings onto a leaf, ties this hastily together like a food bundle, and gives it to the other. If the latter is ready to respond to the proffered affection, he will open the bundle and pretend to eat of it, saying finally, "ma mane a dĕ̄," that is, "I have eaten." If he is not inclined to respond, he will throw away the bundle, of whose contents he has full knowledge.

Concerning masturbation, see below, page 130.

857 something to do near the village, and when he has gone they call to him, "endele o o o...", and he answers, "o yo o o o mur e mur a ne e nzine bekun nlu si mebo yo mura kue a ba a muge nie a nu" (there is a big man on the road, a phantom with his head down and his feet up and a red mouth). Endele keeps answering until he has done what was asked of him. Usually he comes back before this from fear of the phantom of which he speaks and which he thinks he sees.

●892 Puberty, Adolescence. Puberty occasions no ceremony, but from then on the child has the right to eat the take of his hunting and fishing, which was formerly forbidden him. This prohibition is called eki wo.

304 Circumcision is done either before or after puberty. It is an operation which is usually performed for many children at a time, and takes place in the early morning. The operator (nkir) comes to the village without the children's being told, and the fathers who wish their sons circumcised watch them so they do not run away. The children are led behind a hut where pieces of red wood have been prepared. [87] A hole is made in the ground, and the pieces of red wood are put in it and set on fire. Each child sits on the stump of a banana tree. The operator uses a well-sharpened razor. Before the operation he fills his mouth with seeds of wild pimento which he chews. He takes the foreskin of the child in his left hand, pulls it, makes a mark on it with his nail at the place where he will cut. The father of the child sees whether the cut piece will be of the desired size, and if he agrees the operator slices the foreskin with one stroke of the razor and spits the pimento, which he has in his mouth, onto the wound. Then he says, "fam e ne e saga e saga sag mi sag nkñi," an obscene expression which it is impossible to translate here. The circumcised child goes and sits near the fire of red wood. The foreskin is placed on top of a banana tree, [762] whose fruit is cooked and eaten by men only. The circumcision is [824] an occasion for rejoicing; it is done so that the children will not die and also to remove the foreskin which keeps a man from being strong.

304 Female circumcision is never practiced any more. It was formerly 481 done to married women of notoriously bad conduct in order to punish them. The woman was fastened to two stakes in the village square. The clitoris was removed by the man who did the circumcising and was then attached by a thread and put around the neck of the woman, who had to keep it that way for several days to her great shame. The

no more than a mere conventional taboo, as with certain words considered crude in French. At birth and until weaning a baby is ntyen (nken) or nkeñelé.

After weaning, which usually occurs when the child begins to walk by itself, between eighteen months and two years, the nken becomes a mongô (mone fam • boy; mone minga • girl); an uncircumcised boy is called more specifically nsôél.

Circumcision takes place between eight and twelve years of age (1), before the first premonitory signs of puberty, especially the

1. In former times it was sometimes put off until the youth had killed his first enemy. See Trilles (no. 166) and Largeau (no. 48).

appearance of the first pubic hair (afañ, related to the verb fañ • to do well, correctly, on purpose, from the masculine root FA?). The circumcised boy, ntyi'an, "cut one," becomes an adolescent, ndôman, a term also meaning "son" (in relation to a man, see above, p. 63). Correspondingly, a pubescent girl becomes ngon (which can mean at the same time young girl, daughter of a man, or moon: ayene ngon, "to see the moon," that is, to be menstruating), or also élenan. /57/

The adolescent boy is still évis, uninitiated. The missions have now adopted the term mvôn, "initiated," to denote church members. Formerly, one became mvôn after initiation, mostly in the great national so initiation, the members of which were called monewôsô (probably "child of the death /la mort/ of the sô"; compare this with the joking relationship awusô • the dying /le mourir/ of the sô).

After initiation, that is, somewhere between the sixteenth and twentieth year, a young man though of military age was not yet a nya môlô, a true person. This he became only upon marriage, when he attained what might be considered his legal, civil, even economic, majority.

A girl, ngon, who became ngal or nya ngal, a true woman, by losing her virginity, after marriage was nya minga, a /married/ lady, and évila or évina, a matron, when she had brought up her first children. A man with grandchildren was ntole môt, an elder, usually around forty; this was the highest possible social position. Indeed,

initiations and now catechism bring all the boys and girls of a village together.

Adult surveillance is casual: grown people mainly want /95/ children to know their place and not to be a nuisance. Otherwise, it is mostly the older children who take care of the younger ones.

c. Adolescence

Boys and girls share their mother's hut until the beginning of adolescence, at which age the boys go to live by themselves, formerly in the "guardhouse," aba, nowadays in a hut on the paternal "allotment." Formerly, girls were sometimes married off before birth and went to the husband's village at about eight years of age; this is very unusual today, but it is still fairly common for them to go at that age to a paternal or maternal aunt or to a married sister, where they act more or less as servants until puberty, being trained meanwhile. It is also quite common for boys to go to live with a relative whose house is nearer a school than is their own village (1).

1. But a motive of proximity to school is not a complete explanation, merely an additional reason for leaving. In fact, a study of urban centers equipped with schools of a good level shows that 30 percent of the children live outside the paternal household with uncles or grandparents. Whatever a father's personal view, he could never refuse his son to relatives expressing a wish to have the boy for some time. (J. B.)

The bongô /children/ become nôman, a youth, or ngon, a girl, at the onset of puberty. The transition is marked by circumcision among boys, atyi'i aryel, in the past sometimes followed by the first initiation, bekungu. Circumcision is done between the ages of six and twelve, usually around ten. Nowadays it is often done at a dispensary, while it formerly was the occasion of a family and village ceremony. Subjects for circumcision prepared for the ceremony with a relatively short seclusion (of a fortnight) during which they were

youths in the aba and prepared for further initiations, while beginning to participate fully in masculine activities, work and games. The bekungu (Fang, bekhun?) initiation that came directly after circumcision was not a general practice. My own impression is that this was not a tribal or clan rite like ngi, but that of an association of diviners or seers involving only specially endowed individuals, perhaps related to the ndong rite restricted to grown men, which appears to have identical ritual tattoo marks.

For the mo'minga reaching puberty there is no stage equivalent to circumcision. In spite of what Trilles says, excision has apparently never been used except as a punishment for certain kinds of adultery or mild incest. It must not be forgotten that a little girl very soon went to live with her affinal family and that she was deflowered as soon as she reached puberty. She very rarely remained nlenan, that is, pubescent and unmarried, and then for a very short time. One might almost say that her adolescence was telescoped into the period between childhood and the arrival of puberty marked by the mevungu rite.

This adolescent phase is now prolonged by the law fixing the marriageable age at fourteen (puberty usually comes during the twelfth year), by school attendance, and by the change in the bride-price system. Most of my friends of a certain age see in these facts the reasons for a crisis in immorality which they probably to some extent exaggerate.

Nevertheless, first menstruation was apparently acknowledged in a ceremony in which only women took part, but this may have been merely a preliminary to the mevungu initiation, about which hardly anything is known. Otherwise /as regards female adolescence/ coition is forbidden to immature girls, while unmarried girls who have begun menstruating have actually great sexual freedom, even in Christian circles. It must, however, be realized that only too often, especially in schools, there are girls deflowered before puberty, whereas boys seem to wait for circumcision /97/ before their first exploits — there are parents, worried about their sons' "good behavior," who give them aphrodisiacs as encouragement.

d. Transition to Adulthood

The ndoman is not yet a real person, nya mbö; undoubtedly he participates in men's work, in hunting and clearing the land, but he

is not yet admitted to the essential functions of full manhood: ritual warfare, and marriage. Formerly, he was not until after the great tribal initiation, sô. SÔ is the name of a large red antelope, Cephalophus castoneus, found in great quantity in the forest and in the galleries of the park-savanna. The meat is taboo, éyi, to the uninitiated (bibi) and, a fortiori, to women. It may seem strange that Trilles does not mention it in Le totemisme chez les Fang, although the sô seems to be one of the most important tribal totems. It should be observed in this connection that the sô rite, widespread among the Cameroons Pahouin, including the Beti, and among those of the Woleu-N'Tem, seems to vanish somewhere between Mitzic and N'Djolé, while some of its features are to be found in the initiation to the bidri, which is basically merely an adjunct. It would therefore appear to have gone to pieces at the same time as the structure of the meyoñ, to be revived in the extreme south by the bwiti, reported by Trilles, which is at present moving northward. Nevertheless, I must point out that what Trilles describes under the name of bawu may well be sô.

Initiation ceremonies were filmed among the Eton of Saa in 1935; the film is kept at the Musée de l'Homme. Bertaut (no. 110) gives a very full description of the outward forms of the initiation, Stoll (no. 84) an interpretation of its symbolism.

Initiation took place about every three years (every seven mimbu?). Bertaut states that a ceremony might be arranged after some serious happening in a village. It lasted three months (one year, according to Stoll, who counts in the preliminary ceremonies for the initiation proper and the period following) and entailed great expense for sacrifices on the part of the parents of initiates and especially the initiation leader, the nkpwé sô (judge of the sô, lit., butcher of the sô), a senior chosen from the most wealthy and respected. From this point of view, one may believe that the rite coincided with the desire for levelling of wealth which appears to have been so constant in Pahouin society. The nkpwé sô did not himself lead the ceremony; he was the instigator and the person responsible, but the celebrant was a diviner, a mfeb sô, "sô wise man" or "sô measurer" or "sô pouch," if the tone is changed (vek • to take aim, to compute, to divine, to measure).

The main theme of the rite, of which the following description is quite incomplete, was the death of the sô, awu sô, afterwards eaten